Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honor and privilege for me to be amongst the distinguished delegates in the Fourth Conference of Transport Ministers. On behalf of the Royal Government of Bhutan, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to UN ESCAP for successfully convening this meeting.

Mr. Chairman
Availability of efficient and affordable transport not only improves convenience for people but plays a critical role in improving productivity and reducing transaction costs, thus providing overall positive thrust to the economy. It is, therefore, important that the transport systems are developed in ways that are accessible, affordable, sustainable and inclusive.

It is for this reason that the transport system should not only be safe for movement of passengers and goods alone, but also responsive to the rapidly changing technological and economic environment. It is therefore very important for the sector to be environmentally friendly and sustainable.

Mr. Chairman
I would like to report that Bhutan has witnessed unprecedented socio-economic growth over the years with the transport sectors playing a major role. Further, as a landlocked country, Bhutan relies heavily on overland transit through neighboring states for access to sea ports and transit to other countries creating a great deal of economic inefficiencies. The transport system in Bhutan is therefore, far from being sustainable. For this reason, the development of a safe, affordable, efficient,
sustainable, and inclusive transport system remains a priority for Bhutan in the 12th Five Year Plan and beyond.

Mr Chairman
The Royal Government of Bhutan has undertaken several initiatives, some of which are as follows:

- Electric vehicle initiative: by the end of 2022, about 300 internal combustion engine taxis would be replaced by EV taxis. Further, by the end of 2022, a network of charging stations would be established in all 20 districts. This is aimed at reducing vehicular pollution, dependence on imported fossil fuel and adverse impact on human health. This is in line with our commitment to remain carbon neutral which was first declared at the COP 15 including all the subsequent Conference of Parties.

- Bhutan is also exploring alternative modes of transport, such as railways, cable cars, ropeways, etc. to make the transport system in the country more resilient and to provide alternative transport choices to meet the growing demand for transport services.

- We continue our efforts to establish inter-districts public transport services and focus on ‘last mile connectivity’. Government also provides subsidies to encourage private operators to provide scheduled transport services on unprofitable routes.

- Bhutan continues to invest in Urban Transport System - such as enhancing the city bus services through provision of additional bus fleets, construction of four-way lanes to introduce Bus Rapid Transit system in Thimphu City and introduction of city bus services in other major urban centers.

- As part of our global commitment, Bhutan has recently launched the Low Emission Development Strategy or LEDS for the surface transport sector. The LEDS 2021-2050 is a high level thirty year strategy document that provides direction and strategy for development in the transport sector. Further, Bhutan
is also working on a comprehensive Surface Transport Policy to include the emerging priorities for the transport sector.

_Mr. Chairman_
Despite the government's investment, provision of urban and rural accessibility continues to be a key development issue in the country. Provision of transport infrastructure and services are costly and extremely challenging. Logistics industry is under-developed and therefore unable to offer high quality service. While rapid motorization has improved the life of people and reduced hardships, the rise in incidents of road crashes is a growing concern. The government resources are often inadequate to finance transport system development and road safety programs.

_Mr. Chairman_
As we progress, new issues and challenges continue to emerge that are of local, regional and international concern. We must therefore be prepared to work together to overcome the numerous challenges. We must all draw lessons from the ongoing pandemic and its impact on transport which calls for a more resilient transport system to ensure an undisrupted supply chain.

Therefore, I would like to reiterate that cross border and regional cooperation and integration have become extremely important for all of us to grow together and benefit collectively from. On our part, Bhutan will continue to contribute and participate actively in the entire value and supply chain to further our common goals.

I acknowledge that the proposed Ministerial Declaration and the Regional Action Plan have been discussed at different levels for adoption and I commend UNESCAP for the hard work in leading this Ministerial Conference.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the role of our development partners will continue to remain crucial to help in implementing the Regional Action Plan.

I thank you for your time and attention.

TASHI DELEK

***********